

# Time, Calendar, and Festivals

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Hi my name is Sam Cohen and I use the pronouns she/her/hers. Today, we are going to be discussing time, calendars, and festival's significance in early Judaism.

I will begin by discussing how time was measured by early Jewish people. In the first century, time referred to the divisions in the day, the seven days of the week, the Sabbath, the Jewish calendar, and annual festivals (Stern, 2011, 669). Time was also measured from creation to the present day and it included significant events in Jewish history (Stern, 2011, 669). 50 year periods were called jubilees and 7 year periods were called weeks (Stern, 2011, 669).

The Jewish day begins in the evening when the sun sets. However, the active portion of the day began at sunrise (Stern, 2011, 670). In the New Testament, the day is divided into twelve hours which are almost always referred to in multiples of 3. For example, mid-afternoon prayers happened in the 9th hour (Stern, 2011, 670). The exception to this rule is in Matthew 20.1-16 when in the parable of the landowner the eleventh hour is proverbialized (Stern, 2011, 670).

The seven-day week has its origins in the story of creation. However, the days of the week were not widely used by Jews for dating things until the first century (Stern, 2011, 670). The Sabbath fell on the Saturday of each week and was used as a day of rest. The Jewish week was centered around the Sabbath as evident in the New Testament where the other days of the week are rarely mentioned with exception to Friday which was used as a day to prepare for the Sabbath.

Work was prohibited on the Sabbath and its prohibition served two main functions. First, the Sabbath allows the people of Israel and the angels to have a specific time where they can celebrate and worship God together (Stoner, 2020, 688). Second, the restrictions of the Sabbath were intended to set the holy people apart from other people (Stoner, 2020, 688). According to Philo and Josephus, the Sabbath was to be used as a time for "discussing ancestral philosophy and nature," reviewing the Lord's commandments, and relearning the law. Jesus and his followers respected resting on the Sabbath in Jesus' interpretation of rest

as evident in Matthew 16.1. In addition, Jesus often taught in Synagogues on the Sabbath (Stern, 2011, 671).

At various points in the New Testament, Jesus and his followers are seen referring to or acting in accordance with common time structures (Stern, 2011, 669). In Matthew, the passing of time is used as an allusion. For example, when Jesus spends 40 days and 40 nights fasting in the wilderness (Matthew 4.2). The three words used for time in the New Testament in Greek are, *kairos*, *aion*, and *chronos* (Stern, 2011, 669). These words match up with their Hebrew translations. The author of Matthew uses a new phrase which would become a rabbinic expression. The phrase “this age and the age to come” appears in Mt. 12.32 and in Hebrew translates to o’la’m ha-zeh and o’la’m ha-ba (Stern, 2011, 670).

Moving on to the calendar, the Jewish calendar was based primarily in lunar events. The new moon signaled the beginning of each month, and years would consist of twelve to thirteen months (Stern, 2011, 671). This calendar was widely used in Jerusalem and surrounding communities, but communities from further away likely had their own calendars. Although fast days, such as Yom Kippur, were included in the Jewish calendar they rarely appeared in the New Testament (Stern, 2011, 672). This is strange since fasting was mentioned frequently.

The New Testament is notorious for lacking dates on events which makes it difficult to determine when exactly events occurred. The New Testament often fails to say the year when an event occurred. This is made worse by the fact that the Gospels rarely agree with one another on exactly when an event occurred (Stern, 2011, 672).

In early Judaism, festivals were centered around the Jerusalem temple however they could be celebrated elsewhere. The main festivals of Passover and Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, and Booths were used as occasions for pilgrimage to Jerusalem (Stern, 2011, 671). The purpose of the pilgrimage was to participate in sacrifice and worship in the temple. Pilgrimage was common, but appeared to be optional. Other festivals that did not warrant a pilgrimage include the Sabbath and the festival of Dedication also known as Hanukkah (Stern, 2011, 671).

Passover took place on the fourteenth of the first Jewish month. In this festival, a lamb was sacrificed in the temple in the afternoon and eaten later at night (Stern, 2011, 671).

According to Matthew 27, Jesus was crucified around the time of Passover. This led to him becoming associated with the Passover lamb and eventually Christians added the ritual of commemorating his crucifixion to the festival (Stern, 2011, 671). This led to the creation of their own festival, Easter.

Thank you for listening to my presentation!

### Bibliography

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